

# Reason and reasonableness as pillars of education

## An Ethical Updating of Don Bosco's Legacy

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### I. INTRODUCTION

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There are two well-known perspectives in talking about the pedagogy of Don Bosco: on the one hand, the binary idea of a repressive versus a preventive system and, on the other, the triple concept of 'kindness, reason, religion' (*amorevolezza, ragione, religione*). Without neglecting the first contrasting dyad, we start with the triad and pay special attention to what Don Bosco once called the dimension of 'reason' (*la ragione*) and at other times the dimension of 'reasonableness' (*ragionevolezza*). Precisely this double word-usage offers us a global framework to shed light on an essential aspect of the Salesian spirit's pedagogical relationship, namely the significance of 'law and reason' as an indispensable ethical foundation and of 'reasonableness' as a concretisation of that pedagogical style in daily interaction with children and youngsters.

### I. NO EDUCATION<sup>1</sup> WITHOUT REASON AND LAW

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Both on the basis of his own human experience as well as his faith in God's love, Don Bosco believes that all education finds its starting point *and* form in a 'loving treatment' of the educatee (*educandus*)<sup>2</sup>, namely the child or the youngster. We can label this as the emotional dimension of the pedagogical relationship. Love (*amore*) is the heart of the educator that moves him to 'warm-heartedness' (*amorevolezza*), which Don Bosco also describes as 'family spirit' and a style of trust and 'confidentiality' (*famigliarità*).

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(1) We understand education in a broad sense, namely as upbringing, and should therefore not be reduced to the traditional understanding of education as instruction or school.

(2) The Latin 'educandus' literally means: the person to whom the work of education by the educator is intended, literally the 'educatee'. In our essay we use the term *educandus* to refer both to the child and the youngster as the object pole of the pedagogical relationship. Note, however, that by stating that the child and the youngster count as 'object' of education does not mean that they would only be the 'direct object' or, put more eloquently, the 'addressees'. They are equally the 'subject' of their own education. Not only are they the ones for whom education takes place, they likewise take part as subjects and actors in the education process.

## 1. 'Non-incestuous' or 'chaste' educational relationship

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Here, the importance of 'law and boundary' – or rather law as boundary – arises immediately so that the style of warm-hearted and confidential interaction between educator and *educandus* would not derail into one or the other form of abuse. In this regard, the necessity of reason arises as the management of emotion in the emotional pillar of the Salesian pedagogical system itself. We want to concretise this by linking the idea of 'chastity' as a first form of reason and law with '*amorevolezza*'. We take inspiration from the anthropological redefinition and broadening of the concept of 'chastity' that our confrère and well-known moral theologian, Xavier Thévenot, has developed.<sup>1</sup> Precisely by linking chastity with the prohibition against incest, he broadens the strict sexual significance of chastity into a general human significance (in which, of course, the sexual significance is included). The incest prohibition, namely that no sexual contact may take place between parents and children nor between members of the same family or one's own relatives, functions as the foundation of civilisation precisely because it draws an unassailable boundary between the generations. By broadening this strict significance of the incest prohibition in terms of relationships, however, we end up in a recalibration of 'chastity' as 'non-incestuous'. To make this clear Thévenot starts with the etymology of the word 'chastity', which remarkably enough is laden with a deep anthropological – generally human – truth. The word 'chaste' in fact goes back to the Latin '*castus*'. The opposite of '*castus*' is '*incastus*', of which '*incestus*' is a synonym and is translated as 'incestuous'. In other words, in terms of etymology one who is incestuous is unchaste. This etymological remark, however, is only interesting when one interprets the term 'incestuous' more broadly than the common linguistic usage where – as we already mentioned – a sexual relationship with a next of kin is meant. In the perspective of this broadening, we consider as incest every behaviour that strives to extend and to repeat the condition of non-distinguishability that exists at the beginning of life between child and mother. A behaviour is then chaste when one is made capable of surpassing the condition of amalgamation at the beginning of one's existence.

For this, we find a point of contact in the perspective of psychoanalysis. It points out that for a child, learning to live in a human manner means acquiring its 'separateness and independence' whereby it opens up to the other than itself, learning to develop a respectful relationship with the other. Well, this is only possible by breaking away from 'immersed participation', by separating itself gradually from the fusional oneness – the bondedness – with her or his origin, in other words by making itself distinct and by distinguishing itself. Or put differently, by definitively losing and abandoning her or his origin. We can paraphrase here the Gospel text: "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Mt 16,25) by saying: "For those who want to save their fused lives will lose their human lives, and those who lose their fused – immersed and amalgamated – lives for the sake of the other than itself will save their human lives." We must abandon literally and figuratively, factually and emotionally, our mother's bosom – the parental 'nest' – to be able to bond with the other than ourselves in a non-consuming, liberating manner.

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(1) X. THÉVENOT, *Repères éthiques pour un monde nouveau*, Mulhouse, Salvator, 1982, pp. 44-52; Id., *Les péchés: que peut-on en dire?*, Mulhouse, Salvator, 1993, pp. 29-31.

It turns out here how human life and growth always implies a 'renunciation', namely a renunciation of the undifferentiated and fused condition of coinciding with one's own origin. In this regard, the human person is not born 'chaste' but becomes chaste, and is assisted precisely by the crisis that is caused by the prohibition against coinciding with one's own origin. Chastity is no self-evident fact but a task, and it is not given once but time and time again. One *is* not chaste; one *becomes* chaste. And this happens precisely through a humanising interaction with one's own desires in confrontation with reality. In that confrontation, one learns to renounce the world without difference and without deficiency, and a world of omnipotence where one would be the central point as an absolute master. And note well, this is not only applicable to the mother-child relationship, but to all later relationships. It is namely in the relationships with new, non-maternal others, that every human person is faced time and again with the temptation to repeat or to 'demand' the original fusional connectedness with the mother, whereby the new relationships in turn become again incestuous and thus unchaste. Hence the challenge that appears not once but time and time again is to renounce the (at times strong, passionate) temptation of fusional relationships.

For the pedagogical relationship, this means that it is only 'chaste' when it is 'non-incestuous', meaning to say not fused and locked up but creating room for the independence and individuality (alterity) of the child or the youngster. An educator should never give in to the desire for fusion, whether it shows up on his side or on the side of the educatee. A pedagogical relationship that is worthy of the name is faced with the appeal and the challenge to build up an asymmetrical reciprocity, so that the child or the youngster would never be caught in and by the relationship. When Don Bosco suggests that the educator must be the 'friend' of the *educandus*, this then should not be understood wrongly, namely that the pedagogical relationship must take place as a reciprocal relationship between equals. The inequality and the level difference between educator (adult) and educatee (child, youngster) need to be maintained and given a positive form. Otherwise, both the independence and freedom of the child or youngster are compromised as well as their possibility of establishing contacts and building up relationships with 'new' others outside of the pedagogical relationship. A pedagogical relationship is only 'chaste' when it respects *and* promotes asymmetry, difference. This also explains why Don Bosco immediately links the qualification of the educator as 'friend' with that of 'father': "friend and father". Through his pedagogical task, he is invested with the authority and responsibility 'to lead' the minor – which goes beyond all simple and simplistic symmetry. Abolishing pedagogical asymmetry creates the humus for the abuse of power, including emotional intimidation and sexual assault, including forms of unhealthy confidentiality and familiarity. Hence, in line with the cautious Salesian tradition, 'particular' or 'tender friendships' are unacceptable, including their physical expressions – like touching the face, caressing the *educandus*, being embraced by the *educandus* – precisely because they easily become ambiguous and pave the way for infringing the integrity and intimacy of children or youngsters. In our interaction and proximity, the necessary distance must always be preserved: it is about a cautious and careful interaction, a true proximity without absorbing the child or youngster and binding it to ourselves in dependence. Only a 'love in restraint' is non-suffocating and thus pedagogically responsible. Only thus, thanks to the educational relationship, can the gradual emotional maturity of children and youngsters grow.

## 2. No humanising education without boundary rules

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By linking *amorevolezza* with chastity we have also inadvertently linked it with the law as prohibition. By doing so, we would like to critique a current one-sidedness: 'too much emotion and too little law'.<sup>1</sup> Emotion without law is out of control and lethal. In the idea of the law, we see a form of reason or intellect. Pedagogical love that time and again runs the human – all too human – risk of amalgamating identification must, in all its cordiality and proximity, be characterised at the same time by the objectivity of reason. Remarkably, as we have mentioned in the beginning of this essay, Don Bosco and the Salesian tradition interchange two terms, namely *reason (ragione)* and *reasonableness (ragionevolezza)*. Even though they are intertwined in reality, still they deserve to be distinguished from each other. While reasonableness is especially about the style of pedagogical treatment, reason is rather involved with the intellect as the surpassing of subjective emotion and thus as the confrontation with what is objectively true and valuable. Hence, before we reflect on reasonableness as a pedagogical method, we first anchor this reasonableness in an ethical reflection on law and prohibition.

We would like to make explicit the relationship between ethics and education, more concretely the anchoring of education in ethics. We will do so starting from a thorough and in-depth reflection on the creative significance of prohibition. Here, it is not so much understood as legal 'regulatory' prohibition, namely the formal regulation in a group's organised life, but as ethical prohibition, which from now on will be simply referred to as prohibition. For that purpose, we take our starting point in the narrative of the so-called rich young man (Mt 19; Mk 10; Lk 18).

When a man, not a Pharisee or specialist in the Torah, but just 'someone', being wealthy, and - for Luke - also powerful and honoured, because a ruler, asked Jesus to show him the way to 'eternal' and full life, he received as an answer: "If you wish to ENTER INTO [not STEP OUT OF] life, keep the commandments" (Mt 19,17b). Jesus thus refers that person to the second tablet of the Ten Commandments: "not murder, not commit adultery, not steal, not bear false witness..." The question then immediately arises and in all acuteness, certainly today to our ears as we are more than attached to freedom and 'fancy' – our own desires and preferences – how can prohibition and life go together? Are not prohibition and life simply irreconcilable, just as our spontaneous intuition suggests? For an answer to this question, we again take inspiration from the insights of Xavier Thévenot on the 'paradox of the prohibition'.<sup>2</sup>

We must delve into the significance and the operation of the prohibition itself. At first sight, a prohibition is not very much appealing to us. Through its negative formulation it sounds harsh and unrelenting to our ears. It goes directly against the struggle for power of our desire that wants 'everything at once'. Not only is it unreasonable in its striving but it

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(1) T. ANATRELLA, *La différence interdite. Sexualité, éducation, violence trente ans après mai 1968*, Paris, Flammarion, 1998.

(2) X. THÉVENOT, *Souffrance; bonheur, éthique. Conférences spirituelles*, Mulhouse, Salvator, 1990 (2<sup>de</sup> ed.), pp. 61-89.

does not accept in and of itself any hindrance or questioning. That is why it is utterly 'normal' that humans have difficulty time and again with ethical prohibitions.

At first sight, the prohibition seems completely negative but precisely in and through its negativity it offers more room for freedom and creativity than the commandment that prescribes an action. Indeed, a prohibition opens up the field of human possibilities because it only outlines the boundary of humaneness and does not determine nor indicate normatively that which is humane or meaningful.<sup>1</sup>

What is characteristic of the prohibition is that it appeals to human creativity by closing off the *impasses* and *wrong tracks*. A simple example in the field of education can make this clear. Imagine a family with children going for a walk in the forest. When they come upon an intersection with five bifurcations the 'problem' arises as to which path the children (will) have to take. The parents can tackle this problem in two ways. One possibility is that they themselves determine which path is the best for the children, and they normatively impose this path. With this, they can act directly in an imperative and authoritative way, or – what usually happens – rather indirectly, namely by means of enticement and 'dressing up' of the 'best path' that they present to their children. They present this path in such a 'beautiful' and enticing way, for instance by pointing out the largest circus – the wonderful reward – that awaits them at the end of the path and the colourful and fascinating attractions of various clowns, artists, acrobats and magicians along the way, whereby not only the 'end-goal' but also the path itself is presented pleasantly, in the hope that they can bring their children 'without coercion', as it were, to choose the 'best' path that is laid out for them. Such a values education, however, rests on ideological manipulation, even though it camouflages its authoritarian-imposing character behind the façade of a decorated and 'embellished' positive value-attraction. In this way, the freedom of the growing youngster is strongly restricted, if not radically assailed and destroyed. The other possibility consists in that the parents only intervene educationally when their children are about to take one of the five paths that is a dead-end path: 'Do you not see what that sign says: "No entry: dead-end road"?' By means of this approach the creativity of the educatees is not restrained, but on the contrary challenged, since four other paths are laid open among which they themselves must now choose. The prohibition does not say what they must do, what is best for them; it only says what they must not do in order not to end up in the wrong. The prohibition refers only to the other paths as possibilities by denying entrance to, or rather by prohibiting, the dead-end path. The prohibition possesses especially 'the virtue of the negative': it prevents children and youngsters from becoming mercenaries of the law, meaning to say slavish followers and executors of a prescription. It also arouses in them the necessary resistance against those that enact or perform the law whereby they are protected from identifying themselves with the educator, with all its risks of one or the other form of abuse.

Refraining from a non-value – from the negative (e.g. bullying) – meaning to say not committing a violation (of the prohibition against bullying) is in itself not yet a merit. Although this restraint is already an achievement and can call for much effort, everything else still remains to be done. In this regard, the prohibition opens up the path for creative

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(1) P. BEAUCHAMP, *D'une à l'autre montagne. La loi de Dieu*, Paris, Seuil, 1969, pp. 30-34.

freedom. To use an image from football: prohibitions draw out only the lines on the football field within which a qualitative football game can be played. They only make possible the football game; of themselves they are in no way the game itself. Even when there are perfect and indisputable game rules, of themselves they do not guarantee a qualitative football game. Even the referee does not offer any certainty for high-class football. He is only there to lead the game in the right direction, and he is after all only 'visible' when an offence is committed. Only then does he intervene to prevent the football game from being affected as such, without concerning himself further with the quality of the game. (The referee does not blow the whistle, for instance, to point out to the public the 'magnificent' game of one of the players or of the entire team...) For a qualitative football game, more is needed namely good players who under the leadership of a skilled trainer not only develop further their playing capacity but also form together a team with 'spirit' and commitment. In the same manner, prohibitions are like boundary rules that draw the lines within which human dignity can be developed, without themselves determining and developing qualitatively this human dignity. In other words by opening up the path to freedom, the prohibition opens up the path to personal, interpersonal and communal creativity giving shape according to one's own insight and capability to the value that is protected and profiled by the prohibition. The prohibition only points out a 'path of death' and for the rest leaves it people with the full responsibility to discover and explore the 'path of life'.

Let us briefly illustrate this paradoxical relationship between prohibition and creativity on the basis of the already cited prohibitions from the second tablet of the Ten Commandments. Except for the prohibition against adultery, which in its particularity concerns intimate sexual relationships, the other prohibitions – do not kill, steal, bear false witness – have a general application in the sense that they concern all possible relationships between people. If we try to positively formulate one of these prohibitions, a shift in levels always takes place. While the prohibition forbids a concrete, negative deed or action, for instance 'to kill', 'to lie', 'to steal', where it turns out that a prohibition also implies a double denial, the corresponding commandment lends itself to the level of disposition, to be understood as the quality of the moral personality or as virtue. The positive reverse-side of 'You shall not kill' is the appeal to 'respect for life', of 'You shall not lie' the task to honesty and authenticity, and of 'You shall not steal' the imperative to 'respect property (mine and thine)'.

No quality of proximity, of caring and love between persons, is possible if killing takes place, just as no honest society based on trust and confidence, no respect for what is mine and thine nor recognition of each other's otherness are possible if lying and stealing are committed. When aggressiveness, lying and disrespect for 'mine and thine' become fundamental drives, meaning to say when one starts from the principle (certain conflicting situations where higher values that are at stake are not taken into consideration) that one in all circumstances and equally towards anyone may speak untruths, may violate other's 'ownness', and may use violence. In doing so, a humane social life is fundamentally undermined. But with that, all is not yet said about ethics. For if people do not use violence against each other, there still is no concrete experience of love and caring. Or when people do not lie to each other, an atmosphere of trust and authenticity is not automatically created, just as there is not yet respect for what is mine and thine, for each other's uniqueness and contribution in a relationship or in a community when people do

not steal from each other or do not violate the uniqueness of the other. When one observes the prohibitions and does not commit violence, not lie or not 'steal' what 'belongs' to the other, one has not yet done anything in order to realise a life-promoting, upright, respectful and faithful inter-human and social relation. The minimum conditions for that purpose are indeed present. The space for humane and loving relationships is created. There is a bottom in the glass that is, however, not yet filled with water. The bottom is indeed necessary, or else everything is spilled away, but in that case the glass is not yet filled with drink. To fill the glass is not only not doing something, but also doing something concrete. But for this concrete action, namely the real authentication of non-violent, genuine and fair relationships, in which also the differences of the persons is acknowledged and estimated in tangible forms and signs, one cannot rely on the prohibition. For that, one must appeal entirely to the capacity of one's own freedom in order to design in a creative way the shapes and paths of effective respect for life, trust, respect for what is mine and thine, and reliability.

An important pedagogical aspect of this view on ethical prohibitions is that they are valid for both poles of the pedagogical relationship, namely not only for the *educandus* but also for the educator. The prohibitions, just as we have sketched them from the narrative of the rich young man and the second tablet of the Ten Commandments, draw the outlines of the pedagogical playing field in the sense that the educators are oriented in their educative treatment of children and youngsters by the prohibition against violence, 'theft' (annulling difference) and lying, because only thus does the educative relationship acquire a frame that is worthy of human dignity. This dimension deserves our time, with its special attention to the 'victims' of all sorts of violence and abuse. On the other hand, as boundary rules the prohibitions are also applicable to the behaviour of the *educandus*. An essential goal of education is indeed that children and youngsters are initiated into the symbolic order – the playing field – of human values and norms, via the prohibitions. As boundary rules they trace the conditions for the protection, acknowledgement and development of their own personal unassailability and integrity as well as those of others ('you shall not kill'). They also create space for authentic relationships ('you shall not bear false witness') that at the same time command respect for each other's individuality and difference ('you shall not steal').

### III. PEDAGOGICAL REASONABLENESS

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This initiation of children and youngsters is a learning process, marked by trial and error, progress and regress, and in any case by a versatile and wrinkle-free dynamism. Humane behaviour does not fall out of the sky nor is given 'by nature', but is the result of a 'gradual discovery and practice'. For this we find inspiration in the so-called "law of gradualness", as it was launched and introduced by John Paul II in the apostolic exhortation on the family *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) (FC). The synod document interprets the 'law of gradualness' (nr. 34, par. 4) as the "dynamic process" (FC nr. 9, par. 2) of the 'step by step and unceasing progress' of people in their moral life. The concept of gradualness rests on the conviction that the human person is an historical being: "Man,

who has been called to live God's wise and loving design in a responsible manner, is an historical being who day by day builds himself up through his many free decisions; and so he knows, loves and accomplishes moral good by stages of growth" (FC nr. 34, par. 3). The psychological sciences have familiarised us with the development of the person, both on bodily, psychological and affective levels, as well as on the moral and spiritual levels. This leads to the insight that Gradualness, however, does not stand on its own since it concerns an orientated growth. This growth cannot take place in the wild; it must be directed at a goal, namely the realisation of 'meaningful living and acting', in Christian sense a 'love-filled living and acting'.

Such an 'ethics of growth', namely the gradual learning and developing precisely demonstrates the necessity of education: "an educating growth process is necessary" (FC nr. 9, par 2). At the same time, we arrive at the second significance of 'reason', namely 'reasonableness'.<sup>1</sup> The initiation in the world of 'law and reason' takes place – says Don Bosco – according to a particular pedagogical style, namely the '*ragionevolezza*'<sup>2</sup>, to be understood as a form of 'practical wisdom' in the line of Aristotle's virtue of 'phronèsis'.<sup>3</sup> Here he also attempts to offer an alternative to the so-called repressive system that, on the basis of the 'depravity' of humans, proceeds from the assumption that education takes place through strict discipline<sup>4</sup> and that wanton behaviour and the violation of regulations must be 'corrected' unrelentingly (cf. de loud[er] call for 'zero tolerance' against and punishment of petty crime and nuisance by youngsters).

A humanizing education cannot suffice with an educational climate that is emotionally 'sheltering', but at the same time has need for 'explanation' and 'confrontation'. Education should not only be emotional but also rational, meaning to say reasonable and therefore discursive and argumentative. If education would only happen by means of an immersion in the emotionality of a 'cosy home base', in which one enjoyably participates for consolation and comfort, then one ends up in the risk of manipulation that makes use of affectivity in order to lure (especially vulnerable) children or growing youngsters into too much dependence and at times even to a form of 'invisible slavery'. Nonetheless, it is precisely the right significance and task of becoming adult that one no longer lets oneself be determined by another than oneself ('*Fremdbestimmung*'), but determines oneself by oneself ('*Selbstbestimmung*'), both in responsibility for oneself as well as for others. That is why every education should grow towards an honest and objective confrontation with 'that which is worthwhile', and this by means of reasoning and discussion, because these create the objectivity and necessary distance whereby one no longer feels emotionally 'claimed'

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(1) Cf. C. NANNI, *Ragione e ragionevolezza ai tempi di Don Bosco ... e oggi?*, Salesian Forum 2013, 11 p.

(2) Cf. R. BIESMANS, *Redelijkheid in de omgang met jongeren (1876-1884)*, (Don Boscostudies, 14) Sint-Pieters-Woluwe, Don Bosco Centrale, 2000, 141 p.

(3) Cf. M. PELLEREY, *Educare alla ragione e con la ragione nel contesto del sistema educativo salesiano: verso un principio di ragionevolezza pedagogica*, Salesian Forum 2013, 15 p.

(4) Cf. the past whitewashing of maltreatment in boarding schools, orphanages and facilities of special child welfare that now rise to the surface thanks to the testimonies of 'victims' who never have been able to work out what was inflicted on them and who at first never could or dared to come out in the open with their stories.



but is enabled to think and to judge for oneself, and gradually to arrive at one's own views. On the other hand, it is only in the context of sheltering emotionality that the dimension of rationality can be constructively introduced, because rationality and its 'rules' (law) with all its frustrations are too hard and hurtful without the embedment in emotionality, surely for the *educandus* – the child or the youngster – who is just leaving the 'first nest'.

Firstly, in the Salesian pedagogy this means that special attention should be paid to reasonableness with which agreements and regulations are drawn up and communicated, or discussed and developed in consultation – according to the level of their development – with the children and youngsters. Don Bosco found the appeal to 'healthy common sense' indispensable, whereby all grandiloquent artificiality and authoritarian exercise of power in the reasonable interaction between educators and children or youngsters need to be avoided. Educators must have the courage and the humility to likewise appeal to the intelligence of the *educandus*. This presupposes honest and clear communication with reliable information on what is necessary and expected in order to make the educative environment function in a liveable and healthy and 'familial' manner. One should thus not forget that it usually does not suffice to provide information on agreements and '*modi operandi*' only once and that one should repeat the matter regularly. Time and time again, it is important not only to repeat the agreement but also to provide a motivation for it, and if necessary due to changing circumstances, to adjust and justify it more correctly. By so doing, a reasonable education remains a dynamic process that also takes a critical stance towards oneself and thus avoids becoming rigid or degenerating into a (at times covert) 'totalitarian regime' or a 'back-breaking armour': "no coercive measures but persuasion" (Don Bosco). We can also call this the 'wisdom of love'.

Another important aspect in reasonableness as a pedagogical style and method is impartiality. Children and youngsters simply deserve equal treatment on the basis of their equality as human beings. Every child, every youngster, has the right to the same loving treatment and discursive dialogue. Every child and every youngster deserves opportunities, and that is precisely what the pedagogical environment must help to create. Preferential treatment arouses disgruntlement and frustration precisely because one's deeply rooted sense of justice is violated. If educators tackle the faults of the one more strictly than the others, then they themselves cause the disgruntlement – which, in turn, may tempt them to take hard or subtly repressive measures whereby the disgruntlement in the child or the youngster only increases and consequently the pedagogical climate itself is affected. This impartiality should not, however, lead to neutrality as such that there no longer is any involvement or *amorevolezza*. Hence in this context we suggest making use of an idea of Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy<sup>1</sup>, namely 'multiple partiality'. Indeed in their mutual, fundamental equality as humans and also as unique beings, with their own personality and story, people deserve to be treated. Hence educators, precisely on the basis of the choice for *amorevolezza*, are called to bring up all their attention and 'presence' for the individuality of children and youngsters. Only thus do they get the acknowledgement they deserve whereby they can become what they are: unique persons. This attention to or partiality for

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(1) I. BOSZORMENYI-NAGY & B.R. KRASNER, *Between give and take: A clinical guide to contextual thinking*, New York, Brunner/Mazel, 1986.

the uniqueness of the other should not lead, however, to exclusivism, preferential treatment and favouritism. That is precisely why multiple partiality is needed, in the sense that while listening to the story of one child, we try to let the stories of the other children resound in the story of the one child so that the unique child in question does not end up enclosed in its own narrow-minded perspective. At the same time, multiple partiality means that in our partiality for one child or youngster, we remain equally partial to the other children or youngsters in the group or educational setting. If for instance tension or conflict arises between youngsters in a class or peer group, multiple partiality consists in listening to both (or all) parties of the conflict in their emotions and argumentations, and on the basis of this multilateral attention effectuating a conversation and compromise between the parties. In that way, multiple partiality becomes an expression of Salesian reasonableness.

A third important aspect of Salesian pedagogical reasonableness is the way in which we deal with violations or transgressions and sanctions. On the one hand, determination is needed to retain certain agreements and boundary rules as expressions of important values, and this precisely to guarantee an ethically qualitative pedagogical environment. At the same time, sufficient mercy, forbearance and compassion are also needed to ensure understanding for the 'mistakes and errors' of children and youngsters without thereby explaining away what was wrong. Educators are all too aware, even on the basis of an honest self-knowledge, how children and youngsters are (or can be) unstable and fickle as they grow up. Don Bosco himself was in this respect a huge realist, almost a borderline pessimist, as a consequence of the Jansenist influence of his theological training that emphasised heavily on the idea that the human person is a sinner and thus affected by wrong inclinations. Today it seems we find ourselves in the other extreme of a pure optimistic and romantic view (under the influence of Rousseau) on the 'natural [spontaneous] goodness' of the human person whereby we no longer dare to mention – although we do realise it – that on the moral level the human person is surely vulnerable and does not automatically choose for the good, and at times takes a long path – full of twists and turns and detours – in choosing for the good. The determination to prevent evil should thus not degenerate into hard inexorability with no attention for the vulnerability of children and youngsters that is made apparent in their personal biographies. Hence, Salesian reasonableness not only acknowledges the fragility of the *educandus* but also strives to get to know him or her better individually so that the educator can understand each one uniquely and let oneself be guided by that knowledge in the pedagogical treatment and 'measures', which must be handled with discretion and utmost respect. Reasonable treatment does not underestimate nor overcharge. Pedagogical reasonableness ensures that firmness never ends up in unmerciful hardness and roughness: it maintains 'moderation' and finds the 'right balance' or rather effects the 'right combination' [compromise] between firmness and gentleness. It lets itself be led by love 'that banishes fear' as mentioned in the Bible, to which Don Bosco also explicitly refers: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love" (1 Jn 4,18).

This 'correct moderation' likewise includes a pedagogically sound handling of punishments for violations and mistakes. That wisdom is based on different aspects: one the one hand, the mentioned factual fragility (finiteness) and ethical vulnerability of

children and youngsters in their growth; on the other, the circumstances and forms of 'complicity' of others within which the violation took place; and, last but not least, the seriousness of the violation. For sure when it involves serious violations, which are related to the prohibitions in the Decalogue we just sketched, an honest confrontation with the facts is desirable. However, a mere confrontation with the violation itself is insufficient. The 'guilty one' must be given space to relate one's own story, not only about what has happened but also the context, the provocation, the reasons ... One who commits an error should never be 'enclosed' in one's guilt without being heard. A climate of attention and acknowledgement is thus needed, and all forms of threats and blackmail need to be avoided. With regard to sanctions, Don Bosco and the Salesian tradition are proponents of 'an education without punishment' or, more nuanced, an education with as minimal punishment as possible. In *Il sistema preventivo* we read literally: "I say in all honesty: I dislike punishment. I do not find it pleasant to have to scold someone who fails with the threat of punishment: that is not my system!" Corporal punishments are surely and simply out of the question, and today we can likewise say: even the so-called 'pedagogical tap' must be avoided. The fundamental principle of a reasonable education is that sanctions should be avoided as much as possible. Often and in spite of themselves, on the basis of their personal and contextual injuries, youngsters may be 'out of balance' but one should not lose sight of the emotionally 'humiliating' impact of a punishment. Punishments that are given and implemented with the best intentions can cause a sense of hurt and humiliation amongst those who have to undergo them. And this can remain irreparably etched in their 'soul' and 'flesh', causing all sorts of feelings of rancour and 'counter-revenge' to arise. When educators are themselves marked by affective immaturity, they can take the violations by the *educandus* so personally – and it can also be a case of bullying by children or youngsters! – that they themselves are hurt and out of that hurt they react and punish. Whatever the (possibly understandable) basis of the hurt may be, it can never provide the correct motivation for a pedagogically reasonable interaction with the undesirable behaviour of a child or youngster. Dealing with offences committed by children and youngsters in a reasonable manner requires self-control and deliberation (with oneself, but at times also with others). At the same time, such a reasonable treatment of those who fail or derail allays the fanaticism of the struggle against evil. Severe violations or forms of criminality amongst youngsters, for instance, unleash feelings of indignation and anger in the bystanders, even in the educators and attendants. Even though those feelings are understandable, and likewise suggest a correct awareness of integrity and values, one should still not be blind to the risk that those feelings may derail into a heavy-handed battle against the inflicted evil, while neglecting the person – the often injured youngster – behind the mischief. Only when the educator elevates the emotion of his indignation or even 'moral repulsion' to reason, is a humane, i.e. reasonable, sufficiently balanced and future-oriented treatment of the 'perpetrator' possible.

In this regard, it is important to point out a way of sanctioning that is very powerful *and* at the same time very ambiguous. An educator can withhold one's *amorevolezza*, meaning to say stop the expressions of benevolence and cordiality. Even in a Salesian context, one sometimes notices a plea to replace real, objective forms of punishment with this 'emotional deprivation': a firm look or a non-friendly gaze can bring about more than a slap or a threat of punishment, so it says. The insight into the force of heartfelt affection

(*amorevolezza*), however, should make us utmost careful in implementing this 'emotional punishment'. Approaching the *educandus* in an indifferent or negatory manner can be more destructive than an objective punishment; it can be a form of emotional blackmail against which the child or the youngster cannot defend itself. Hence an objective but then reasonable or fair punishment is at times preferable to a hard emotional distancing, although the principle remains that punishment should be seldom. Not tackling children or youngsters for serious infringement on agreements and regulations likewise means not taking seriously their freedom and responsibility, but then the punishment must be in proportion to the degree of the offence or the inappropriate behaviour. Hence confrontation with and possible punishment for the offence must always contribute to imbibing and developing a sense of responsibility, without crushing the *educandus* under this awareness. Gentleness and understanding, forms of *amorevolezza*, still remain. To put it differently, possible punishments must always be remedial, directed at reparation and growth. With Don Bosco, this strong conditional framing and relativising of punishment flows forth from his preference for a preventive approach, in contrast to the repressive approach. A preventive approach on the basis of monitoring and positive empowerment<sup>1</sup> is today more than topical considering the unashamed plea from a clear segment in our society for 'law and order', namely for zero-tolerance and an unrelenting approach to youngsters (and adults) who go wrong and disturb the public order with their petty (and less petty) forms of roughness, aggression and criminality. In the framework of the plea of Don Bosco and of those who follow him for a preventive approach lies also the importance they attach to confirmation and reward, which in turn can again be seen as expressions of *amorevolezza*. Admonition and censure for what has gone wrong can be a form of respect for the responsibility of the child or youngster, with the necessary gentleness for its still underdeveloped self-determination. But that disapproval should never be absolutised into the only form of 'liability' whereby the *educandus* gains a sense of 'total disapproval', with all its irreparable damage in the long term. Disapproval must remain limited in object, time and space, so that space remains for approval, praise and appreciation. Giving acknowledgement for the good that was done arouses in children and youngsters an unseen force of self-confidence and of commitment to the good as well.

In this regard, we would also like to refer to the Salesian tradition of the 'word in the ear' (*la parola all'orecchio*), namely the educator's personal whisper in the ear of the child or youngster of a short word 'en passant' (in passing): in the midst of a game or other activity. Its object can either be a disapproval or a confirmation and encouragement, a personal question or word of advice. The advantage is that it is private, and that is surely of huge importance as far as disapproval is concerned. Public reprimands risk humiliating the child or youngster before the eyes of its companions and classmates, which can lead to depression or repressed anger. Hence the golden rule never to rebuke or reprimand an *educandus* in the company of one's peers, classmates, companions or friends. In this regard, Don Bosco used an expression from traditional ascetic (spiritual) literature: parental admonition should always take place '*in camera caritatis*'.

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(1) C. LOOTS & L. MERTENS, *Preventie: uit het oog, uit het hart?*, in: C. LOOTS, C. SCHAUMONT (reds.), *Don Bosco uitgedaagd. In gesprek met actuele tendensen in opvoeding en hulpverlening*, Oud-Heverlee, Don Boscovormingscentrum, 2002, pp. 49-76.

#### IV. INTEGRAL EDUCATION AS 'AESTHETICS': THE NEED FOR COMMUNITIES OF PARTICIPATION

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Not everything has been said, however, about the aspect of reason and reasonableness in upbringing, certainly not in the perspective of Don Bosco's view on 'integral education'. So that reasonableness that initiates in the (ethical and practical) 'laws' of reason could be effective, more still is needed than the law. We would like to call this the aesthetic dimension of upbringing or education. We saw above how the prohibitions form the 'indispensable conditions'<sup>1</sup> for love, stronger still how they only indicate the conditions for love without delineating that love and thus without prescribing how that love must acquire concrete shape.

For that positive delineation of love, children and youngsters do not so much need behavioural norms that prescribe how they must live and act humanely, but rather they need suggestive examples, inspiring models, testimonies and qualitative experiences of others, that 'address and attract' them without moralising them in a patronising way. In that manner, they will strive to integrate the values that take shape in the examples and experiences in their own way – i.e. creatively – and substantiate them. We can call this the aesthetic dimension of 'law and reason' – of ethics. It no longer concerns the bottommost boundary of prohibitions or the minimum, but rather the optimum or the quality of 'meaningful life and action', which in the Christian perspective is the 'fullness of love'. In ethics today, the importance of 'moral communities' is highlighted where thanks to the example of parents, educators and other adults the humane can be tasted and learned in both a realistic and appealing manner.<sup>2</sup> It is by means of tradition, meaning to say by what has been handed down and thus precedes us, that we can, with taste and conviction, make certain attitudes, modes of behaviour and lifestyles our own. Ethics and education can never be a 'one-man-show', a solipsistic affair. We are dependent on our 'predecessors' in order to be able to grow towards moral sensitivity, truth and praxis. No one becomes ethically sensitive and proficient without parents and grandparents, family, relatives, educators and the wider community, out of which new people time and again receive the chance to discover and to tread into their path of life. It is precisely through this community life anchored in space and time that ethical aesthetics, which is indispensable in achieving a 'loved-filled' life and action, takes shape. In other words, it is not just 'important' that people are able to participate in moral communities – it is as necessary as the air we breathe. In such moral communities, ethical quality is not underestimated. Ethical quality carries with it a stimulus by means of its 'beauty', in order to grow towards that which is loving, each one according to his or her own possibilities and fragilities or limitations. Because of this participative character, we call these moral communities 'communities of participation'. In such communities of life, people –

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(1) In the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (1983) John Paul II, inspired by Augustine, labels the prohibitions of the second tablet as 'the basic condition for love of neighbour'. And 'they are the first necessary step on the journey towards freedom, its starting-point.' They are therefore 'only the beginning of freedom [and love], not perfect freedom [and love]...' (nr. 13).

(2) A. MACINTYRE, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory*, London, 1965; S. HAUERWAS, *Vision and Virtue. Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection*, Notre Dame, University Press, 1974.

throughout the generations – share with each other’s ethical inspiration and thus give a solid grounding to their own ethical commitment and make it ‘bearable’. Only by participating in concrete ethical projects, wherein the commitment of the whole person is involved – not only one’s intellect, but also one’s desire, feeling, fantasy, body and will – can children and youngsters acquire the chance to develop from the inside out a delicate taste for a love-filled life and its according actions. Whoever cannot ‘share’ in values, modes of behaviour and life, and this in the double sense of ‘co-experiencing’ and also ‘co-constructing’, can never acquire a sensitivity and taste for what is a meaningful and loving life, neither for the joy that the effort and ‘burden’ thereof can bring along. Without a community of participation, children and youngsters can never discover that virtue not only takes effort and sacrifices, but also the fact that ‘it does one good’. In that way, the link with *amorevolezza* becomes clear. On the ethical level, the community of participation is the expression of the original sheltering and encompassing affectivity and affection, and thus of *amorevolezza*, stronger still it is the condition of possibility and embedment of every education, in particular of moral education.

For that purpose, every moral community must also be a ‘*narrative community*’, where one exchanges; where educator and *educandus* find each other and listen in a non-normative but suggestive, enriching, challenging way; where adults do not moralise from their experiential wisdom, but give witness and inspire, invite and literally ‘pro-voke’. The narrative community issues a ‘call to move forward’, so that the ‘pre-given’ ethical heritage can take shape in a dynamic and even progressive way. An ethical narrative community is literally a community where people tell their story, and in so doing, they ‘recuperate’ something as a community. It is also where the ‘foundational’ stories with the experiential wisdom of the ‘ancestors’ are not only narrated on, but also celebrated in symbolic signs and rituals. As a narrative community a community of participation always is and becomes an ‘expressive’ community!

In this regard, we would like to point out the importance of ‘eating together’ and of the ‘family table’, which are entirely in line with the Salesian family spirit. The starting point of my reflection is anecdotal. When I returned from Minster (Kent, UK) after a three-day formation at the Fraternities of Charles de Foucauld (26-28 April 2012), I read an article in the *Daily Telegraph* (30 April 2012) while waiting in line in Heathrow Airport. The article was about a research on “the decline of family meals” and its impact on the ‘social skills’ of children. A sociological study came to the conclusion that (especially in cities) 1 out of 10 adults no longer eat together with their children and that another 10 per cent eat together with their children only once a week. The increase of TV-meals on the sofa deprives children, according to another research, of ‘vital skills’. Children grow up and miss the opportunity to talk with adults, to exchange ideas, and to learn ‘good manners’, says Richard Harman, chairman of the Boarding Schools’ Association. He adds that the decline of family meals is moreover linked with a ‘health risk’, namely an increased intake of high fat content food. This ‘decline of family meals’ likewise runs parallel with a strong emphasis in schools and families and in popular culture (among others in teen magazines, weeklies, on TV and social media...) on personal ambition (‘getting somewhere’) and material success whereby the ‘self-esteem’ of children is changing severely. We are getting a generation of children and youngsters that is ‘out of balance’, namely some have too low self-esteem (because they cannot reach the norms of ‘ambition’) and others have too high self-esteem precisely because they (are able to) go along with the ‘ambition’-ideology wherein attention is rather given to creating a ‘circle of influence’

rather than striving for a 'circle of concern'. The emphasis on material success and 'achieving something in life' comes at the expense of 'establishing a sense of belonging' and that leads to an 'inversion' of fundamental values and its consequences. Our school and education systems, and our public culture and mentality, says Harman, turn values on their heads whereby essential values are affected. Children are told that they 'will belong somewhere' when they achieve material success, while they first have to belong somewhere – emotionally and spiritually – in order to draw out confidence and to concretise their personal development and ambition. Apparently, we are gradually paying a hefty price for dissolving the connectedness that serves as the first and essential source of value-development. And he concludes: "As a society, we have lost the beneficial effects of sharing a meal around the table. Eating together has, since the earliest times, been the most formative way of building a sense of togetherness and facilitating conversation across the generations. But in the United States and increasingly in the UK, a lot of families don't even have a dining table. A sense of sharing, reaching out to other people and the ability to form and sustain relationships is just not valued as much as it was".

I see therein the challenge to focus on eating together, working together and relaxing together, in the Salesian spirit, as the context for the development of values and norms – of 'reason and law' – and certainly not to allow that the 'family spirit' be displaced from its central position by the growing neoliberal emphasis on 'competency development'. And neither can we ignore the importance that the Salesian tradition attaches to 'feasts'. Here, one loves to cite the mischievous statement that is ascribed to Don Bosco himself – to reinforce its authority and importance: 'If there are no feasts, you have to create them'. They make it possible for one to participate via emotion and imagination – detached from external moralising obligations – in the implied values, and to gradually become aware of them and appreciate them. Feast also create 'family spirit' and 'belonging', not only or primarily as a means to education but especially as a goal and value in and of itself.

## CONCLUSION: REASON AND REASONABLENESS GIVE A REALISTIC FORM TO CORDIAL AFFECTION

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In our attempt at describing and translating in a contemporary way some important aspects of '*ragione*' and '*ragionevolezza*', it has become clear how, upon closer inspection, they are linked to *amorevolezza*. Reason, which manifests itself in and through the law and boundaries, refers to the community of participation in which not only values but also norms and rules are practised and experienced throughout society. But even reasonableness stands in relation to and interaction with *amorevolezza*. Put differently, it is a realistic embodiment of *amorevolezza* itself in the sense that reasonableness, in the context of the learning process that is education per definition, unfolds as a style and method to teach children and youngsters amiably and wisely – viably and gradually – how to deal with boundaries, agreements and authority. Even though *amorevolezza* and *ragionevolezza* are distinct from each other, in the reality of education they are inseparable!

## A mountain hike

To conclude, I would like to make use of a dream of Don Bosco, which I revise a bit – as a kind of Midrash - hopefully without doing it too much injustice. By doing so, I try to evoke again how an authentic Salesian education is rooted in a balanced relationship between *amorevolezza* and reason, mediated through reasonableness. In this way a healthy relationship between ethics and education can be developed and realized.

Ethics and education, as guidance, can be described as a mountain hike: not remaining indecisively non-committal or merely fretting and fuming, but to go on a hike, not just wherever but with a prospect before you, a goal that is well worth it. Going along life's way is not an aimless wandering about but having a horizon - literally a 'panoramic view' - before you that not only reaches farther but also higher and invites you to go to the top. A dynamic life is constantly aiming for the top. Sometimes it is fairly visible, sometimes not, but the top is always there. There is always the prospect or the goal commandment ('*Zielgebot*') of the meaningful.

To successfully accomplish a mountain hike one needs a guide or a map. These are the fundamental values and norms that indicate direction like a compass. Just think of non-violence ('you shall not kill'), mutual equality ('you shall not steal'), trust and tenderness ('you shall not commit adultery'), authenticity ('you shall not bear false witness'). But you also need equipment and an outfit: thick-soled boots, two pairs of woolen socks, a backpack with provisions, eye protection against the cold, sunglasses against bright light, a traveling stick, and so on.

Upon departure, it turns out that a number of children and youngsters do not see the top. For them, it is hidden in the mist. Others think that the top or the meaningful is somewhere else and therefore have a different view regarding the way to the top. Moreover, there are minors who have good intentions, but have no boots or have only one pair of socks or too little substantial provisions. These are children and adolescents who because of circumstances are not always well-equipped in life. However, even they are called to go on the mountain hike and become full human beings.

But some among them will never be able to reach the top. Should they then remain below or be left behind, in the presumption that they are indeed not capable? Should we then abandon them and tell them they do not count? Does it suffice that we provide them with only a kind of 'occupational approach, keeping them busy at at the foot of the mountain so that they will not be any source of harm to themselves or to the community? Or should we indeed invite them to begin the hike and urge them to grow in the direction of the top by making sure that they have two pairs of socks or by giving them a map? Even though that will not always be helpful because they perhaps cannot read well? Shouldn't we then be near them in any case, literally 'assist' them, so that during their mountain hike they can reach what they are capable of reaching, or even something more?

Some will perhaps succeed in climbing almost to the top. Perhaps, they have already reached a panorama of a certain quality. For a number of minors that is very good, more than good even, even though they do not reach the meaningful. Others only come half way, which is already something. This is not the 'full good', but a 'lesser good'. And note well that this



limited good is not simply a shortcoming and lack, but a real good which for them - in their situation of incompleteness and incapacity - is the achievable and thus the best possible and attainable. Or if they only succeed in reaching one-fourth of the way, they surely did not reach the 'real good' or the meaningful – the 'fullness of love' - but indeed a smaller 'lesser good', but nevertheless a good. In that, these minors are already 'redeemed'. Precisely for that reason, we should not abandon these minors at the foot of the mountain, or at the first stopover. They are indeed able to do more. They need a little push in the direction of the top, in order to climb up higher.

A realistic growth ethics, according to the 'law of gradualness', and with an eye to the meaningful, employs mercy in order not to demand the meaningful so unrelentingly in all circumstances that some drop out because they cannot do it and just sit at the side of the mountain path or not even begin the hike. That is dramatic. It is precisely in the name of the gospel that brings redemption and healing that we, on an ethical level, also have to liberate and heal youngsters. A growth ethics, as expression of the 'law of gradualness', leaves in all discretion its own lofty standpoint, and thinks and feels from the standpoint of the other, in this case that of children and adolescents, and their real and, to be sure, sometimes limited possibilities. That is why we plead, in line with Don Bosco who integrated the reason (of moral law) with the reasonableness of the guidance on the path towards 'meaningful living and acting', for an ethics of the attainable, in the framework of an ethics of the meaningful, that means the fullness of love.

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